United Nations A/ES-10/750–S/2017/351

General Assembly
Security Council

Distr.: General
8 May 2017

Original: English

General Assembly
Tenth emergency special session
Agenda item 5
Illegal Israeli actions in Occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory

Security Council
Seventy-second year

Identical letters dated 24 April 2017 from the Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to attach herewith a letter written by Palestinian leader and parliamentarian, Marwan Barghouti, who is leading the largest hunger strike by more than 1,500 Palestinian prisoners and detainees in the prisons of Israel, the occupying Power (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would arrange to have the present letter and its annex distributed as a document of the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, under agenda item 5, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Riyad **Mansour**
Ambassador
Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations

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Annex to the identical letters dated 24 April 2017 from the Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council

Letter from imprisoned Palestinian leader and parliamentarian Marwan Barghouti to his fellow parliamentarians around the world on the "Freedom & Dignity" hunger strike

Dear fellow parliamentarians,

If you are receiving this letter, it means that Israel has chosen to continue down the path of prohibited collective punishment and incitement against Palestinian prisoners rather than meeting their legitimate demands. It means that I was placed yet again in solitary confinement along with fellow hunger strikers. But we will not be silenced or surrender.

The hunger strike is a legitimate and peaceful means to protest the violations of our basic human rights as prisoners, as guaranteed under international law. Palestinian prisoners may be at the mercy of the occupying Power, and that is why they are protected under international humanitarian law; but they are not powerless. We resorted to this hunger strike after months of efforts to have our legitimate demands addressed. These demands concern the mass arbitrary arrest of Palestinians, torture and ill-treatment, punitive measures against prisoners, deliberate medical neglect and denial of family visits and contacts with our loved ones and education. These are human rights in their most basic form.

Dear colleagues, dear friends,

I salute your solidarity with your imprisoned Palestinian colleagues and the strong support of parliaments around the world for the rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to self-determination, and for the end of the occupation and the achievement of just and lasting peace based on international law.

I was the first parliamentarian to be arrested in 2002. Since then, Israel has arrested 70 parliamentarians, more than half of the Palestinian Legislative Council; 13 remain imprisoned today. This is an insult to parliamentarians everywhere, to democracy everywhere and to human rights everywhere. This is an insult to freedom and justice, and it must be answered.

The fate of Palestinian parliamentarians is a reflection of the fate of the people they represent. For over 50 years, Israel, the occupying Power, has arrested hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, the equivalent of 40 per cent of the male population in the Occupied Palestinian Territory; 6,500 languish in Israeli jails today. For Israel, we are all guilty and our unspoken charges are that we desire freedom, are hungry for freedom and strive and sacrifice for freedom.

Israeli laws authorize colonialism, collective punishment, discrimination and apartheid. Shouldn't those who vote in favour of such laws be held accountable? Some Israeli parliamentarians have advocated our arrest. They are sitting among you, while we are unable to.

As for the Israeli courts, they are part and parcel of this colonial and military occupation, which aims at annexing our land and further displacing and replacing our people. Israeli military courts have a conviction rate for Palestinians that has ranged in recent years between 90 and 99 per cent, while Israelis committing crimes against Palestinians enjoy near absolute impunity. I say it yet again: this is a judicial apartheid whereby Palestinian existence and resistance is criminalized.

I was convicted by one of these illegitimate courts. I refused to recognize the court, even more so as an elected representative of the occupied people. I was sentenced to 5 life sentences and 40 years by the occupying Power's courts for terrorism, in what was denounced unanimously by international observers as a political show trial. Not a single country on earth accepted this verdict. This has been the fate of the leaders of liberation movements around the world and across history. The Rivonia trial, which condemned Mandela to a life sentence, did not delegitimize him or his struggle; it only further delegitimized the apartheid regime prosecuting him.

This is why the companion of Nelson Mandela and anti-apartheid icon Ahmed Kathrada launched the "Free Marwan Barghouti and all Palestinian Prisoners International Campaign", just as he had launched the "Free Mandela Campaign" before spending 26 years in apartheid jails himself. This is why he launched it from the cell of Nelson Mandela on Robben Island. This is why 8 Nobel Peace Prize laureates, 120 Governments and hundreds of parliamentarians, leaders, academics, artists, intellectuals and civil society organizations have joined the campaign. This is why two Nobel Peace Prize laureates, parliaments and parliamentarians have nominated me for the Nobel Peace Prize as an expression of support for the Palestinian people's struggle for freedom.

Palestinian prisoners have always suffered from injustice and violations of their rights. But in recent years, Israeli occupation authorities have even deprived us of rights acquired through prior hunger strikes. The escalation in punitive and inhumane measures against prisoners and their loved ones could not remain unanswered. We decided to go on hunger strike because we were left with no other choice. Palestinians suffer and sacrifice to be able to enjoy the rights they are entitled to and yet deprived of. Palestinian prisoners are no exception.

We have named this hunger strike "Freedom & Dignity". These are words that resonate deeply in the hearts of our nation, which has been struggling for 70 years for their realization. But they are also words that resonate around the world, as part of universal history and the struggle against all forms of oppression and servitude. They are values that are at the core of humanity and that are indispensable to the achievement of peace. There is no peace possible between the oppressor and the oppressed, as oppression and peace are mutually exclusive. There is no peace possible between the prisoner and the jailer. Freedom is the way to peace.

I call on you to speak up for those that Israel is trying to silence. I call on you to stand up for those thrown into dark cells to be forgotten. I call on you to support the legitimate demands of the Palestinian prisoners' movement and to uphold international law. I call on you to support the freedom and dignity of the Palestinian people, so peace can prevail.

Some may believe that this is the end of the story, and that I will perish here in solitary confinement. But I know, even in this forced solitude, that we are not alone. I know that millions of Palestinians and many more around the world stand with us. We shall meet soon, in freedom.